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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRATISLAVA 000338

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ELECTION SHOCKER: MECIAR AND GASPAROVIC TO SECOND
ROUND WHILE REFERENDUM FAILS

CLASSIFIED BY: AMB. RONALD WEISER FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D

11. (C) SUMMARY. THE RESULTS OF THE APRIL 3 FIRST ROUND OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS SHOCKED MOST OF SLOVAKIA. HIGH POLL NUMBERS, COMPLACENCY, AND PROTEST VOTES AGAINST RECENT ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL REFORMS HURT FOREIGN MINISTER EDUARD KUKAN AS ALMOST EVERYONE THOUGHT HE WOULD MAKE IT INTO THE SECOND ROUND. LOW VOTER TURNOUT, HOWEVER, WORKED IN FAVOR OF VLADIMIR MECIAR (HIS VOTERS CONSISTENTLY SHOW UP AT THE POLLS) AND SMER-BACKED IVAN GASPAROVIC. THE SECOND ROUND WILL BE HELD ON APRIL 17 -- HIGHER VOTER TURNOUT WILL LIKELY FAVOR GASPAROVIC WHILE MECIAR WOULD PROBABLY WIN IF VOTERS STAY AWAY. THE REFERENDUM SEEKING EARLY ELECTIONS FAILED DUE TO INSUFFICIENT VOTER TURNOUT. END SUMMARY.

THE RESULTS

12. (U) OUT OF 4,202,899 ELIGIBLE VOTERS ONLY 1,986,214 TURNED OUT TO VOTE (47.9 PERCENT, COMPARED TO 74 PERCENT IN 1999). THE TOP SIX VOTE GETTERS ARE BROKEN OUT BELOW, AND THE REMAINING FIVE CANDIDATES EACH RECEIVED LESS THAN 1 PERCENT.

	VOTES	PERCENTAGE
VLADIMIR MECIAR	650,242	32.73
IVAN GASPAROVIC	442,564	22.28
EDUARD KUKAN	438,920	22.09
RUDOLF SCHUSTER	147,549	7.42
FRANTISEK MIKLOSKO	129,414	6.51
MARTIN BUTORA	129,387	6.51

LOW VOTER TURNOUT THE DETERMINING FACTOR

13. (C) LOW VOTER TURNOUT WAS THE CRUSHING BLOW FOR EDUARD KUKAN'S CANDIDACY. ANALYSTS REPORT THAT RURAL VOTERS (OVERWHELMINGLY HZDS) CAME OUT; URBAN VOTERS STAYED HOME, CONFIDENT THAT THEIR VOTE WOULD ONLY BE NEEDED IN THE SECOND ROUND AGAINST MECIAR. KUKAN SUPPORTERS UNDERESTIMATED THE IMPORTANCE OF CASTING VOTES BECAUSE ALL OF THE POLLS INDICATED THAT KUKAN WOULD MAKE IT INTO SECOND ROUND AND THAT THE ONLY QUESTION THAT REMAINED WAS WHO HE WOULD FACE. HUNGARIAN VOTERS STAYED HOME RATHER THAN SUPPORT THE KDH'S FRANTISEK MIKLOSKO AS THEIR PARTY RECOMMENDED. BUTORA'S 6.51 PERCENT WOULD LARGELY HAVE GONE TO KUKAN.

REFERENDUM UNSUCCESSFUL

14. (U) THE REFERENDUM ON EARLY ELECTIONS WAS UNSUCCESSFUL DUE TO INSUFFICIENT VOTER TURNOUT -- ONLY 35.86 PERCENT OF THOSE ELIGIBLE VOTED (12 PERCENT LESS THAN THE PRESIDENTIAL CONTEST), WHILE 50 PERCENT WAS REQUIRED FOR THE REFERENDUM TO BE VALID. (TECHNICALLY, TWO ELECTIONS WERE HELD ON APRIL 3, IN SOME CASES WITH DIFFERENT POLLING PLACES, SO TURNOUT FIGURES DO NOT MATCH.) OF THOSE WHO VOTED, 86.78 PERCENT FAVORED NEW ELECTIONS AND 11.93 WERE OPPOSED. OPPOSITION LEADER ROBERT FICO TOLD THE PRESS THAT HE DID NOT CONSIDER THE FAILURE OF THE REFERENDUM (WHICH HIS SMER PARTY HAD CHAMPIONED) TO BE A FIASCO, BUT RATHER A SUCCESS BECAUSE MORE THAN ONE MILLION CITIZENS VOTED FOR A CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT. FICO DID NOT RULE OUT FUTURE ATTEMPTS BY SMER TO UNSEAT DZURINDA'S GOVERNMENT.

COALITION VOTERS EXPRESS THEIR DISSATISFACTION

15. (C) PRESIDENT SCHUSTER TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THE ELECTION RESULTS REFLECT A PROTEST VOTE. AFTER WEEKS OF BEING TOLD NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE REFERENDUM, COALITION VOTERS FOLLOWED THOSE INSTRUCTIONS TO THE LETTER. HOWEVER, THEY ALSO SHOWED THEIR DISPLEASURE WITH DZURINDA'S SLOVAK DEMOCRATIC AND CHRISTIAN UNION (SDKU) BY NOT VOTING FOR KUKAN. MONDAY MORNING QUARTERBACKS IN THE PRESS PLACE BLAME FOR THE COALITION'S FAILURE ON SDKU FOR NOT CONSULTING WITH COALITION MEMBERS TO SELECT A CANDIDATE WHO COULD HAVE BEEN BACKED BY ALL FOUR PARTIES. KUKAN'S OWN STYLE DID NOT HELP HIS CAMPAIGN. HE WAS LACKLUSTER WHILE STUMPING ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL AND UNINSPIRING DURING A TELEVISED DEBATE WHICH DID NOT MOTIVATE VOTERS TO GO TO THE POLLS ON A WARM AND SUNNY SATURDAY.

MECIAR'S STRATEGY FOR ROUND TWO

16. (C) SERGEJ KOZLIK OF HZDS TOLD EMBOFF THAT HIS PARTY WAS SURPRISED AND EXCITED BY MECIAR'S SUCCESS. KOZLIK EXPECTED

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UND. KOZLIK WAS

CONFIDENT THAT HZDS VOTERS WOULD TURN OUT IN FORCE, BUT MECIAR HAS LITTLE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPAND HIS VOTER BASE AND THEREFORE LOW VOTER TURNOUT WORKS IN HIS FAVOR. HE ADDED THAT THE TELEVISED DEBATES WOULD ALSO FAVOR MECIAR BECAUSE GASPAROVIC HAS ALWAYS BEEN SEEN AS MECIAR'S NUMBER TWO.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW

17. (C) THE SECOND ROUND OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD ON APRIL 17, AND THE COALITION PARTIES FACE SOME DIFFICULT CHOICES OVER THE NEXT TWO WEEKS. IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF ELECTION RESULTS, DZURINDA SAID THAT SDKU WOULD ENCOURAGE VOTERS TO STAY AWAY FROM THE POLLS ON APRIL 17; KDH HAS DONE THE SAME. SMK AND ANO WILL DISCUSS STRATEGIES WITHIN THEIR OWN PARTIES BEFORE MAKING ANY RECOMMENDATIONS TO THEIR CONSTITUENTS. ANO MP CERNA TOLD EMBOFF THAT IT IS IMPORTANT TO MOBILIZE THE VOTERS IN FAVOR OF THE LESSER EVIL, WHOM SHE VIEWS AS GASPAROVIC; HOWEVER, SHE ADDED THAT ANO WAS UNLIKELY TO OFFICIALLY ENDORSE EITHER CANDIDATE. MARIAN LESKO, A POLITICAL ANALYST AND COLUMNIST, TOLD EMBOFF THAT AFTER THE INITIAL SHOCK AND DEPRESSION WORE OFF, HE EXPECTED COALITION LEADERS TO INDIRECTLY SUPPORT GASPAROVIC IN THE NEXT ROUND. FICO AND SMER COULD PLAY THE ROLE OF KINGMAKER IF THEY ARE ABLE TO MOBILIZE THEIR VOTERS. AS ONE OF THE LARGEST PARTIES IN PARLIAMENT AND WITH 24-30 PERCENT SUPPORT IN PUBLIC OPINION POLLING, SMER'S SUPPORT COULD GREATLY ENHANCE GASPAROVIC'S CHANCES OF WINNING. HIGH VOTER TURNOUT WOULD INCREASE GASPAROVIC'S CHANCES, BUT HE WOULD PROBABLY NEED SOME ANTI-MECIAR SUPPORT FROM THE COALITION'S CONSTITUENCY. (SEE SEPTTEL FOR ANALYSIS OF A MECIAR OR GASPAROVIC PRESIDENCY.)

WEISER

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